LA FIESTA DEL CHIVO, NOVEL AND FILM
On the Transition to Democracy in Latin America

Irina Dzero
Kent State University

Abstract: In this article, I compare the attitudes to the recent democratic transition in Latin America in La fiesta del Chivo, the 2000 novel, and in its 2005 film adaptation. In the novel, Mario Vargas Llosa describes how Joaquín Balaguer, the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo's puppet president, put on the mask of a democrat, absorbed Trujillo's absolute power, and went on to serve as president for twenty-four years. In the novel, Balaguer is a stand-in for the Peruvian dictator Alberto Fujimori, who prepares to serve as president for a third term in a row. Why do Balaguer and the artificial democratic transition that he enacted go missing in the film adaptation? The film details instead the crimes of the dictator Trujillo and his inglorious end. I argue that the director adapts the novel's message to a changed political reality in Peru: the dictator Fujimori fled, and the newly elected president is restoring democratic institutions and government accountability.

When adapting his cousin Mario Vargas Llosa's novel *La fiesta del Chivo* for the screen, Luis Llosa left out an important character—Joaquín Balaguer, a former associate of the Dominican dictator Trujillo, who led the country's transition to democracy and became its ever-returning president (when the novel was published in 2000, Balaguer was running for president for a seventh term). The novel describes how Balaguer, at the time Trujillo's puppet president, seizes power after the dictator's death, how he pays off Trujillo's brothers to get them out of his way, how he turns a blind eye to the continuing assassination of political prisoners, how he manipulates the threat of yet another American invasion, and how he masquerades as a democrat to secure the support of American politicians. Thus, the novel depicts the end of one autocrat (Trujillo) as the beginning of another (Balaguer). Masquerading as a democrat, Balaguer went on to serve as president for twenty-four years, which epitomizes for Vargas Llosa the present and the future of democracy in Latin America, and especially in his native Peru, where in 2000, the year of the novel's publication, Alberto Fujimori was preparing to serve as president for a third term in a row. Why does Balaguer go missing in the film adaptation of the novel? Without him, Trujillo's reign freezes in time and space as an era of uncommon cruelty that ended with the inglorious end of its demiurge. It is possible that the filmmaker edited out Balaguer and Vargas Llosa's pessimism about perspectives of democracy in Latin America from his film to adapt its message to a changed political reality. Between 2001 and 2005, the years of the film's making, things were looking up for democracy in Peru: Fujimori fled to Japan; the abuses of his regime were publicly investigated; and the new president, elected in free and open elections, promoted decentralization and the rights of the underprivileged.

Latin American Research Review, Vol. 51, No. 3. © 2016 by the Latin American Studies Association.

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

THE NOVEL, 2000

Even though the film edits out Balaguer, it remains very faithful to the novel's main plot, the story of Urania. This story conjures back to life the cruel dictator Trujillo and contrasts what he thinks he does for his country with what he actually does to the country through the metaphor of a rape. When she was fourteen, Urania ran away from her father, a loyal partisan of Trujillo. She went to the United States, graduated from Harvard, and became a successful lawyer. She never answered her father's letters but paid his living expenses and caretaker fees when his health declined. After thirty-five years, she returns to confront her father, now a quadriplegic who appears unable to speak or understand. Her aunt berates her for abandoning her father, and Urania explains why she fled. When she turned fourteen, her father suddenly lost Trujillo's favor. Desperate, he was ready to do anything to win it back, although to do so was impossible because Trujillo singled out his victims at random to maintain his courtesans in constant anxiety and obedience. At his wit's end, the father decides to buy Trujillo's favor with Urania, his young daughter, but the plan fails because Trujillo is old and sick, even though he denies it.

Trujillo is known as El Chivo (the Goat) for his sexual appetite, which he uses as an instrument of control and domination; for example, he liked to publicly inform his closest associates which of their wives was best in bed. It is crucial for Trujillo to uphold his public image of an indefatigable sexual champion to dominate his accomplices and the nation as a whole. The novel describes the last days of his life, when his aging and sick body is failing him. Now, at seventy, he can no longer control either his urination or erection. With the scared Urania, who realizes that the party at Trujillo's house promised by her father (*la fiesta del Chivo* of the novel's title) is a macabre deception, Trujillo cannot achieve an erection. Infuriated, he deflowers her with his finger. Trujillo cannot let her go unharmed because in all of his interactions with people he must establish his dominion over them. Power is his drive: Trujillo scorns those dictators who choose to flee when things get tight. The day after the rape he brags to his chief of secret police, "A mí sólo me sacarán muerto" (They'll only get me out when I'm dead) (96).[1] He meets death that same night (May 30, 1961) at the hands of men who had come to despise themselves for tolerating his abuses in cowardice.

Unlike Trujillo, his associate Joaquín Balaguer is portrayed as having no interest in sex. Nor is he interested in money, unlike the rest of Trujillo's cronies. Lacking these vices, Balaguer seems inoffensive and insignificant to Trujillo and his entourage; for this very reason he is picked as puppet president. Trujillo is convinced that he genuinely cares for his country. According to the official ideology (drafted by Balaguer), Trujillo ended the fratricidal civil wars, unified the country, and kept it safe from Haiti and the United States, always eager to in-

1. All page citations to this work, unless otherwise noted, refer to the 2000 edition of *La fiesta del Chivo* (Madrid: Alfaguara); translations in parentheses refer to the novel's translation by Edith Grossman, published by Picador in 2002 as *Feast of the Goat*. Translations from other works, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

vade. Moreover, Trujillo, who appropriated all domestic businesses, believes that he did the country a service because no one would dare to steal from him, "el Jefe" (the Chief) (155). In contrast, Balaguer does not seem to believe in anything. He gradually absorbs the totality of Trujillo's absolute power because he knows what all other contenders believe and want. He tells them what they want to hear, plays them against one another, and comes out on top of them all. For Trujillo, who seeks a confirmation of his divine or at least mystical mission, Balaguer invents the doctrine of "God and Trujillo." When the flattered dictator demands to know whether Balaguer really believes that some sort of a higher force sent him to the Dominicans, Balaguer vehemently asserts that he does. After Trujillo's death, Trujillo's brother wants to assume power and tells Balaguer to abdicate immediately. Balaguer avoids complying with this order by turning to Trujillo's wife and asking for permission to wait until the return of her son Ramfis. Alone with Ramfis, he respectfully informs him that the Americans will invade unless the country transitions to democracy and that he, Balaguer, is able to feign this transition. At the same time, Balaguer urges Ramfis to fulfill his filial duty to kill his father's assassins. When Ramfis captures and tortures these in a secret prison, Balaguer proclaims them "ajustificadores del tirano" (executioners of the tyrant) and swears to guarantee their safety and fair trial. Deep inside, however, he would have preferred that they were killed because constant inquiries about their fate "afeaban la nueva cara que él quería dar al régimen" (were a blemish on the new face he wanted to give to the regime) (473). He is relieved when this comes about. Informed that Trujillo's executioners have been taken to an unknown location, and fully aware that Ramfis is behind it, Balaguer feigns ignorance and tells his subordinates to put on a show of a transparent investigation for the Americans: "Es imprescindible que haya testigos de que el gobierno ha hecho cuanto pudo por impedir que se viole la ley" (It is absolutely imperative that there be witnesses to the fact that the government has done all it can to stop the breaking of the law) (477). When Trujillo's brothers burst into his office with machine guns to make him resign and to seize power, Balaguer placidly points to the American ships ready to attack and sends the intimidated thugs on their way, paying them for their "patriotismo" (481). He subsequently drives Ramfis out of the country, feigning regret: "Quiero que crean que todo está cambiando, que el país se abre a la democracia" (I want them to believe that everything is changing, that the country is opening to democracy); and Trujillo's embittered son understands exactly what Balaguer means to do, "para que la gente se trague la pendejada de los tiempos nuevos" (so that people will swallow all the bullshit about a new era) (471). Evicting the chief of the secret police, the former mastermind of political repression and his last dangerous competitor, by appointing him ambassador to Japan, Balaguer flatters him: "Usted es inteligente, no necesito explicárselo" (You are an intelligent man, I do not need to explain it to you). The defeated rival prophesizes that Balaguer, Trujillo's accomplice smeared with the blood of his victims, will be unable to fool anyone: "Nadie se tragará el jueguito maquiavélico de que usted va a encabezar la transición hacia la democracia" (Nobody will swallow the Machiavellian ploy of you leading the transition to democracy). Balaguer serenely agrees

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with him that it will be a difficult task: "Es posible que fracase. . . . Pero, debo intentarlo" (It is possible I will fail. . . . But I must try) (461).

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, 2000

Thus this fictional Balaguer, "presidente pelele, un don nadie" (puppet president, a nonentity) (464), caters to everyone's desires and fears and acquires real power in the Dominican Republic (with the help of the American foreign policy advisers, whose active role in installing and maintaining dictatorships across Latin America to contain the spread of communist "contagion" is a known fact). Balaguer effortlessly moves powerful and dangerous people from Trujillo's inner circle on his chessboard, deeply scorning them for their stupidity and greed. He admires "la exquisita orfebrería" (the exquisite piece of work) that he has set in motion in order to "convencer al mundo de que, con él en la Presidencia, la República está volviéndose una democracia" (convince the world that with him as President the Republic was becoming a democracy) (475). For this portrayal of Balaguer as a hypocritical master of intrigue obsessed with power, Ramón Font Bernard, Balaguer's longtime loyal collaborator who used to direct the national television and the national archive, called Vargas Llosa's novel a "paquete de chismografía y alcantarilla de inmundicias" (a bunch of gossip and sewer of filth) (Aznárez 2000; García 2006). The book's presentation in Santo Domingo took place in May 2000, when the historical Balaguer was running for the presidency for the eighth time. By then he was ninety-one years old and completely blind. Although he lost this last election, Balaguer had served as president for twenty-four years during three nonconsecutive mandates: 1960–1962, 1966–1978, and 1986–1996. In 1988 Ronald Reagan called him "the father of Dominican democracy." In 1997 Dominican congressmen reiterated this statement and officially proclaimed Balaguer the "Padre de la democracia" (Father of democracy), and that just less than a year after Balaguer was forced to step down amid accusations of electoral fraud and the disappearance of his vehement critic, journalist and university professor Narciso González. Regardless, the congressmen proclaimed Balaguer the "Great Precursor of Dominican Democracy, Economic Development, and Political Stability and Governance" (Liberato 2013, 15). Sociologist Ana Liberato argues that the congressmen perpetuated the image of a disinterested visionary that Balaguer had fashioned for himself and had imprinted on Dominican society. This image continued to thrive after his death in 2002, materialized in places named after him (a highway, a metro stop, a plaza, an airport), in exhibitions dedicated to him, and in books about him prepared by the Fundación Balaguer. Balaguer's promoters celebrate his lifelong control over Dominican politics as a "positive and consolidated democratic development" (Liberato 2013, 17).

For numerous historians, sociologists, and political scientists, Balaguer was an autocrat who governed by the methods he learned from Trujillo: buying the support of the middle class with jobs, privileges, and contracts; having political opponents exiled, imprisoned, or assassinated; and using the media to control public opinion (Liberato 2013, 2; Espinal 1992, 112; Betances 2007, 114). Jonathan Hartlyn (1998, 189) defines his rule as neo-patrimonialism, that is, when a ruler uses the

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

state and its resources as if they were his personal property, "creating complex patron-client linkages and, in the process, blurring public and private interest and purposes within the administration." For Balaguer, his party was but an "electoral vehicle," a "political machine" with no ideology other than getting him elected. Relying on a rural, older, less educated electorate that formerly supported Trujillo, Balaguer did not have to worry about having a strong ideological platform—it was enough to impress them as a competent leader who had a personal rapport with them (Hartlyn 1998, 151). The absolute power that Balaguer concentrated in his hands was unchecked by the intimidated and corrupted judiciary. Balaguer reportedly used even economic crises to his advantage: he provoked them and subsequently solved them to demonstrate his superiority over his political rivals (Hartlyn 1998, 156).

For political scientist Howard Wiarda (2003, 95), Balaguer's watermark on Dominican politics for seventy years is a "metaphor for all of Latin America's ambivalence toward, conflict over, and (even now) limited and partial commitment to political democracy." Have things changed? Or do we see more of the same—"the continuities, the persistence of more traditional ways of doing things"? Or would it be more accurate to talk of "blends, fusions, and overlaps of traditional and modern, of authoritarianism and democracy" (Wiarda 2003, 95)? Seventy percent of Dominicans favor democracy over authoritarianism; that same 70 percent believe that an authoritarian ruler is best for the country and its current political and historical situation, which they describe as their "falta de civilización" (lack of civilization). Wiarda believes that Balaguer appealed to the Dominicans by skillfully juggling their opposite desires of freedom and control. Unlike military autocrats of other Latin American countries, Balaguer was a civilian and "was more skillful at hiding his authoritarianism": he violated rights and freedoms while staying "within a constitutional façade that he called 'true democracy'" (Wiarda 2003, 97–98).

Balaguer desired to stay in power indefinitely, like Trujillo before him. He defended this tendency of all autocrats, known as *continuismo,* in his 1952 essay "El principio de alternabilidad en la historia dominicana" while he was still Trujillo's talking head. In short, in this essay Balaguer argues that if the person in power (Trujillo) has superior moral qualities, there is no reason to replace him; it is better for the country if its leader owns domestic enterprises (because his legendary working capacity powers the national economy); and public funds are safer in Trujillo's pockets (he is rich and he does not have to worry about leaving his post anytime soon, and so has no need or desire to steal public funds in a hurry). Truly, can one hope to find a better man to govern this country? In any event, the Dominican people are not ready for a real democracy. And then again, what is democracy if not a "chimera," "una palabra vacía" (an empty word), in the Dominican reality (Balaguer 1952, 15, 11)? In fact, Balaguer argues, Trujillo's regime is the only true democracy: "Hemos creado, en cambio, nuestra propia democracia, y gracias a Trujillo somos hoy el pueblo más auténticamente igualitario que existe en el continente americano" (Instead, we have created our own democracy, and thanks to Trujillo, we are the most egalitarian nation there is on the American continent) (Balaguer 1952, 11). All Dominicans are equal before that one godlike

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

man, Trujillo: "Aquí hay uno solo que manda y dos millones que permanecen sometidos a su voluntad cesárea" (Over here there is only one person who gives orders and two million people are subjected to his Caesarean will) (Balaguer 1952, 12). The taunting effrontery of these and other such sentences is astonishing: Does Balaguer believe in his defense of continuismo, or is it a hypocritical rhetorical exercise?

The arguments from this essay on Trujillo's "most human democracy" blossom in Balaguer's own electoral campaign mottoes: "Lo bueno no se cambia" (Good things do not change) (1974–1978), "Y vuelve y vuelve Balaguer" (Balaguer, again and again) (1986–1990), "Cuatro años más y después hablamos" (Another four years and then we'll talk) (1990–1994), "Y sigue y sigue Balaguer" (Balaguer goes on and on) (1994–1998), and (blessed simplicity!) "Lo que diga Balaguer" (Whatever Balaguer says) (1994–1998). The Dominican politicians who borrow Balaguer's strategies stay in power longer: Leonel Fernández, who calls himself Balaguer's political heir, has served two presidential terms so far. In fact, as his second term was drawing to a close, he had his supporters hail him with Balaguer's phrases—"Vuelve y vuelve" (Again and again), "Reflexione Señor Presidente" (Think about it, Mr. President), and "Sacrifíquese" (Sacrifice yourself)—most likely to prepare the electorate for his return to the presidency in 2016 (Grullón 2014). Balaguer continues to remain the model of Dominican politics. In perpetuating "antidemocratic interactions and paternalistic relations between the political leadership, the citizenry, and political elites," he has shown "how to govern and how a politician should act to be able to win" (Liberato 2013, 27, 24).

Why does Vargas Llosa in *La fiesta del Chivo* devote so much attention to Balaguer, an autocrat masquerading as a democrat who rose to power over the decades on which the novel purposefully does not touch? Indeed, the novel limits itself to relate Trujillo's last day and the six months that follow his assassination, showing the end of his rule, its closure, and its uncoupling from the present. An uncommonly cruel era of repressions came to an end when its demiurge died: this interpretation prevails in many readings of *La fiesta del Chivo*. Critics of the novel reprimand the author for failing to see that international corporations (represented in the novel in a positive light by Urania, a World Bank executive) that repress insidiously replaced Trujillo, who repressed overtly (Fradinger 2010); and for sensationalizing and exoticizing Trujillo's time as an era of sex and murder irrelevant to the present (Gewecke 2001). Scholars who like the novel commend Vargas Llosa for effectively criticizing Trujillo's exceptional evilness by representing him as a satanic figure (Marcus-Delgado 2004) that controlled the body and the mind of the Dominicans (Kruger 2002). The entire second dimension of the novel—the six months of Balaguer's absorbing of Trujillo's power—goes unnoticed in these readings and in the film adaptation.

Indeed, Trujillo dies at the midpoint of the novel, in chapter 12, and then—"Enter Balaguer." In this way, the novel establishes a perfect parity and continuity between Trujillo and Balaguer. The author focuses on Balaguer's supposed transition from dictatorship to democracy and exposes this transition as a sham that all the principal agents—Trujillo's family, the American politicians, and Balaguer himself—see and acknowledge. This democracy is doomed to fail: the novel retro-

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

actively augurs what will happen over the four decades till the book's publication year, 2000—decades of "Vuelve y vuelve Balaguer." When Urania's aunt begs her to forgive her father on the grounds that "eran otros tiempos" (those were different times), Urania is skeptical, stating that something from those times is still in the air: "Eran y no eran. . . . Todavía flota algo de esos tiempos por aquí" (They were and they weren't. . . . Something from those times is still in the air) (514).

PERU, 2000

What is in the air in the year 2000, when the novel sees the light, in the author's native Peru? Of course, it is Alberto Fujimori's determination to remain president of Peru for a third term in a row. Fujimori revealed his intention to rule single-handedly shortly after he defeated Vargas Llosa in the elections of 1990, when he dissolved the Congress, whose members had intended to investigate Fujimori's wife's allegations that he had profited from charitable donations of clothing from Japan (Carrión 2005, 114). Fujimori "framed the coup as a democratic exercise" (Conaghan 2005, 30), calling it "una auténtica transformación que asegure una democracia legítima y efectiva" (the authentic transformation that ensures an effective and legitimate democracy) and promising to do away with the corrupted politicians, judges, and authorities "que impiden la verdadera democracia" (who stall true democracy) (Fujimori 1992). The intimidated media owners chose to support the president after the military guard filled their offices the day of the coup and a number of journalists were detained (Conaghan 2005, 28). This was an unnecessary precaution: the people, instead of taking to the streets to protest this attack on democracy, saluted the return of the self-styled strong leader "que resuelve los problemas" (who finds solutions to the problems), as Fujimori (1999) described himself in an interview. Fujimori's 73 percent approval rating after the coup jumped even higher a few months later, following the capture of the leader of the insurgent guerilla organization Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), which had sown fear throughout the country for more than a decade. Next, Fujimori assembled a more obedient Congress. He changed the Constitution to give himself more power and to allow himself to run for a second term in 1995. When he decided to run for a third term, his obedient lawmakers swiftly fulfilled his wish, circumventing the two-term constitutional limit with the "Law of Authentic Interpretation."

The gradual, all-penetrating excrescence of *fujimorismo* was facilitated by Fujimori's chief of secret police, Vladimiro Montesinos, a lawyer with a bought diploma who gained notoriety for representing Colombian and Peruvian drug lords. Montesinos defended Fujimori when he stood accused of fraudulent real estate dealings during his first presidential campaign; the incriminating documents disappeared and the charges were dropped. Together, Fujimori and Montesinos ran a "secretive and conspiratorial government whose overarching goal became remaining in office and looting the public treasury" (Carrión 2005, 4). Maintaining the facade of democracy and the rule of law, Fujimori and Montesinos authorized extrajudicial assassinations (nine students and a professor from La Cantuta University), kidnappings (such as that of journalist Gustavo Gorriti,

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

who investigated the ties between drug traffickers and Montesinos), and torture (e.g., the notorious case of two female agents of the secret police suspected of leaking information on human rights abuses to the press, one of whom was quartered and the other who became a quadriplegic). The judicial system became a tool for persecuting opponents and rewarding friends, as Montesinos kept judges and prosecutors on his private payroll (Conaghan 2005, 167). Journalists and media owners were harassed or bribed: "Four of Peru's five private television networks were receiving monthly payments [and] the fifth received judicial favors" (Levitsky and Way 2010, 165). A dozen tabloids on Montesinos's payroll worked to discredit opposition leaders, portraying them as corrupt, incompetent, and mentally unstable (Conaghan 2005, 169) and accusing them of "everything from terrorism to homosexuality" (Levitsky and Way 2010, 168). Lacking a coherent party with a strong infrastructure and ideology during the third presidential campaign in 2000, the year of the publication of *La fiesta del Chivo,* Fujimori had to rely on a system of organized corruption (Levitsky and Way 2010, 169). That campaign fed on millions of dollars in state funds, the support of the security forces, and the complicity of at least three of the five members of the National Electoral Board (Levitsky and Way 2010, 169). And yet just before the election (in a 1999 interview with Diego Barnabé), a straight-faced Fujimori praised himself as a firm but democratic leader: "Aquí se vive la plena democracia a través de las elecciones, la plena libertad de prensa, la libertad de expresión. . . . En lo que refiere a los derechos fundamentales del hombre, en Perú nunca hubo un momento en que se los respetara más a plenitud." (Over here we live in complete democracy, with elections, complete freedom of press, freedom of expression. . . . As for what's called fundamental human rights, there has never been a moment in Peru's history when these were more fully respected.) In the midst of repression, corruption, and false patriotism, political activism came to be viewed as opportunistic or pointless. Fujimori eviscerated the public sphere. In the words of political scientist Catherine Conaghan (2005, 10), he created "the appearance of a public sphere normally associated with modern democracy while ensuring that it would not work properly." Vargas Llosa (2001) was pleased to see that the novel's readers detected criticism of Fujimori, who, according to the writer, replaced the terrorism of Sendero Luminoso with state terrorism and put Peru next to Cuba and North Korea on the list of the world's most repressive regimes.

THE FILM, 2005

While the novel narrates precisely the transition from dictatorship to democracy accomplished by Balaguer, the dictator's associate and political heir, and stresses the artificiality of that transition, the film stops at Trujillo's death. Luis Llosa, known for his Hollywood blockbusters *Anaconda,* with Jennifer Lopez, and *The Specialist,* with Sylvester Stallone, began working on the novel's adaptation shortly after its publication in 2000. Despite being the author's cousin and brother-in-law, he competed for the rights to the novel along with everyone else, joking that he did not even get a discount (Comas 2006). The film, released in 2005, drops Balaguer's story entirely and zeros in on Trujillo's atrocities and his

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

punishment. The film ends when Trujillo's life ends, editing out the supposed transition to democracy and the novel's pessimism regarding this transition. The film is a coproduction of Spain and Great Britain. The characters speak English, a fact that annoyed most commentators and did not help the film become a major international success.

The director explains that he found the theme of personal vengeance that brought Trujillo down more interesting than political aspects of the novel (Comas 2006): "Quizás la sed de venganza personal no es muy noble o positiva, pero ésa fue la realidad. Me interesaba más eso que los aspectos políticos, de cómo la dictadura de Trujillo incide de manera trágica en la vida personal de tanta gente." (The thirst for personal revenge may not very noble or positive, but this was the reality. This was more interesting for me than political aspects: the tragic way in which Trujillo's dictatorship influenced the personal life of so many people.) The film begins by telling the audience why Trujillo's assassins want to kill him. The head of the conspiracy, Antonio de la Maza, wishes to avenge his brother, who was an inconvenient witness to the kidnapping and assassination of one of Trujillo's critics. His coconspirator, Amadito, is driven by the humiliation to which Trujillo subjected him as proof of his loyalty: Trujillo had ordered him to break up with the love of his life because of the communistic leanings of her brother, whom he had befriended. Amadito obeyed with a heavy heart. Soon, on orders from his superiors, Amadito executed a subversive, only to discover with horror that he had killed that same brother of his former fiancée. For narrative economy, the film omits or conflates the life stories of other conspirators described in the novel.

Thus, the film sets a clear narrative trajectory: the tyrant, whose absurd and gratuitous cruelty is shown in the rape of Urania and the life stories of his victims and future assassins, will be brought to justice in the end. Indeed, the grand finale of the film is the time of Trujillo's reckoning, right after Urania discloses the horrific details of the rape (the novel reveals them after Trujillo is long dead). The film is designed to make us desire the retribution of the tyrant and rapist. At the end of the film, the badly wounded Trujillo gets out of the car, faces his assassins, calls them "traitors," roars, and raises his gun. The conspirators, one by one, unhurriedly fire a shot at the dictator, and he collapses with a look of hatred on his face. This climactic and dramatized execution of Trujillo, invented in its entirety by the filmmakers, is the telos of the film. The film makes viewers want to see Trujillo die and delivers that punishment. The dictator's death brings the cruel system he had built to an end—doesn't it?

It does, in the director's opinion. This is why what Urania and her aunt say about the transition to democracy—"Those were different times," sighs the aunt; "They were and they weren't," objects Urania—has a different meaning in the film. Whereas in the novel Urania means that the purported transition to democracy did not happen, as one autocrat (Trujillo) was immediately replaced by another (Balaguer), in the film Urania simply means that her father's decision to give her over to Trujillo for sexual gratification can have no excuse, neither then nor now. The scriptwriter has Urania clarify immediately: "There are certain things you can't do. Ever." Also, Urania's promising remark that after Trujillo's death "things only got worse" is left hanging. The film illustrates these words

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with archival footage shows thousands of Dominicans grieving for Trujillo but tells us nothing about what followed his death. Urania's young niece Marianita begs her to explain this deterioration, asking, "What do you mean? I thought we got democracy after that," but her mother nips that explanation in the bud and answers for Urania, "[Democracy came] Later. First there was a bloodbath." Thus, Marianita's mother (and tacitly Urania) acquiesces that indeed democracy did come, only later. By the bloodbath that delayed the coming of democracy she means the civil war that followed the overthrow of the first democratically elected president, Juan Bosch, in 1963. By promoting land reform and the rights of the working class, within just seven months Bosch had turned landowners, industrialists, the Catholic Church, and American foreign policy experts who feared that the country would become "another Cuba" against him. The military junta of three *trujillistas* that seized power could not establish control over the nation, and Bosch's supporters took the national palace in 1965. Lyndon Johnson sent the US Marines to suppress Bosch's supporters, whom he believed to be communists. In the elections supervised by the Americans, it was Balaguer who won. But then, what does Marianita's mother refer to as democracy that came "later," after the civil war? It cannot possibly be Balaguer's second mandate, known as "los doce años" (the twelve years), which was characterized by "systematic incarcerations, torture, and murder"; thousands of lost lives; and the complete disorganization of parties, ending only when the Americans required Balaguer to put an end to state terrorism (Pons 2010, 598). Or does Marianita's mother refer to Balaguer's third and last presidential reincarnation? It seems that she believes that they have achieved democracy in 1992, the film's diegetic present (1994 in the novel), which falls into Balaguer's third mandate (1986–1994). Although with each successive mandate Balaguer grew less overtly repressive, there had not been much increase in democracy: as Howard Wiarda (1995, 181) puts it, "Since Trujillo's assassination in 1961, the Dominican Republic has had nine presidential elections—normally more than enough to say that a country is safely democratic. But of the nine, six have been won by Balaguer; also, six of the nine have been disputed or fraudulent (not necessarily the same six)." In short, the film ends on a reassuring note with Trujillo's death and end of the atrocities, whereas the novel continues after his death and sets outs to expose the perpetuation of authoritarianism in Balaguer, the autocrat who sprang from his predecessor's rib, and indirectly in Fujimori, his Peruvian counterpart, both busy obliterating democracy in their respective countries.

PERU AFTER FUJIMORI: THE CONTEXT OF THE FILM

It is also true that when Luis Llosa began working on the film in 2001, the prospects of Peruvian democracy had suddenly and dramatically improved. By then, Fujimori had fled to Japan, sending his resignation by fax. This happened shortly after he began his third term in office in 2000 amid allegations of fraud and daily protest demonstrations, after a video of Montesinos bribing an opposition congressman to support Fujimori was aired on television. More videos with Montesinos counting out thousands of dollars to politicians and TV channel owners—and

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Fujimori's support collapsed. The opposition leader Alejandro Toledo was elected president in 2001 in fair and clean elections (Levitsky and Way 2010, 169). Born to a poor family of indigenous peasants, Toledo shined shoes and sold lottery tickets as a child (Barr 2003, 1165). An American couple who were Peace Corps volunteers met him by chance and were impressed with his intelligence. They inspired him to apply for a scholarship to study in the United States. Eventually, Toledo earned a PhD in human resource economics from Stanford. Toledo's image as a poor *cholo* who graduated from a prestigious American university and returned to his homeland to become a political leader made him a powerful presidential candidate. After his inauguration, Toledo signed the Acuerdo Nacional, an agreement with other political forces to revive the party system. He made a commitment to democratic consolidation, the reduction of poverty, and an anticorruption agenda. He initiated administrative and political decentralization (Cotler 2001, 62). During his tenure, Peru's political leadership made an unprecedented effort through the Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación to expose the human rights abuses committed in the country's recent past that had been hushed under Fujimori, who was himself involved in them.

Worried that their leaders might be called to justice for these abuses, rival political forces, *fujimoristas* and *arpistas*, joined together to discredit Toledo. Despite the economic growth, Toledo's approval ratings dropped to single digits. As Fujimori had done, Toledo implemented neoliberal policies, opening the economy to foreign investment. The economy experienced surprising growth and the average income increased "to levels not seen for more than thirty years" (Cotler 2010, 64); foreign debt and poverty decreased, and the country's credit rating and employment grew. Toledo developed social programs in rural areas: he provided small loans to peasant farmers and health insurance to poor women and children, expanded drinking water and sewerage infrastructure in Lima's shantytowns; and developed rural education, infrastructure, and electrification (Barr 2003, 1166). The decentralization of power helped foster regional political movements that are more cohesive and committed than the national ones, and more likely to strengthen political dialogue and deepen the Peruvian democracy (Crabtree 2010, 380).

STRICT BUT FAIR: THE FALSE FATHER

Urania is but one of Vargas Llosa's many innocent characters martyred by those they trust most. Bonifacia of *La casa verde* is abused by her husband and sold to a brothel by her lover. The affectionate and childlike deaf-mute Pedrito from *Lituma en los Andes* is murdered by his community as a sacrificial victim. A little boy from *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* is offered as a child sacrifice by his own mother and other ecstatic followers of a pseudo-Christian preacher. The beautiful Meche from *La Chunga* is physically and psychologically abused by her lover as he is planning to sell her to a brothel.

The false father occupies a place apart in Vargas Llosa's rich gallery of abusers. The false father—to a child, to a nation, to democratic society, whom we meet in *La fiesta del Chivo* as Trujillo, Balaguer, and Fujimori—has a real-life counterpart:

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the father of Vargas Llosa. In *El pez en el agua,* written in 1993, a memoir about Fujimori's unexpected 1990 victory, Vargas Llosa includes a parallel story about the physical and psychological abuse he suffered as a boy at the hands of his father. As a child, he could not understand the reason for his father's outrages and violence but carried the fear it instilled in him throughout his life. He writes that fear "se apoderó de mí y fue desde entonces compañera" (took possession of me and from then on was my companion) (61).[2] The child's pleas for forgiveness and mercy infuriated the sadistic father even more: "El terror me hacía muchas veces humillarme ante él y pedirle perdón con las manos juntas. Pero ni eso lo calmaba. Y seguía golpeando, vociferando y amenazándome" (62). (Terror many times made me humble myself before him and beg his pardon with my hands joined. But that didn't calm him down. And he went on hitting me, screaming and threatening.) As he hits his son, the father justifies his actions as fatherly care, a desire to toughen the child lest he grow into a faggot, a "maricueca" (sissy) (62). Even worse, his mother, herself a victim of the father's abuse, entreated young Vargas Llosa to try to win his abusive father's love. After all, she would argue, he was not so bad because he neither drank nor cheated: "No era tan malo. Tenía sus virtudes. No bebía una copa de alcohol, no fumaba, jamás echaba una cana al aire, era tan formal y tan trabajador. ¿No eran éstos, acaso, grandes méritos?" (64). (My papa wasn't so bad. He had his virtues. He never drank a drop of alcohol, he didn't smoke, he never went out on the town, he was so polite and such a hard worker. Weren't those great virtues?)

It was difficult for Vargas Llosa's father to understand how his supposedly worthless son became an international celebrity, although he was certainly flattered by this surprising development. When the father recognized himself in the autobiographical *La tía Julia y el escribidor,* he wrote to Vargas Llosa to thank him for the frank portrayal but also reminded him that his strictness was due to his love for him: "Él había sido severo conmigo pero que en el fondo lo había hecho por mi bien 'pues siempre me había querido'" (150). (He had been severe with me but that when all was said and done he had acted as he did for my own good "since he had always loved me.") Vargas Llosa did not answer this letter, and the father reacted by sending him a violent one, in which he called his son a resentful liar and promised that God would punish him. Vargas Llosa neither saw nor spoke to his father ever again, but he continued to portray him in his novels over and over again, in sadists tormenting innocent people whom they convinced to submit to abuse for, and out of, love.

The false father, "strict but loving and fair," is the fundamental motif in *El pez en el agua.* No wonder the story of the abusive father runs parallel to the story of how Fujimori rose to power, paradoxically, riding on a wave of the great democratic awakening of the late 1980s. Why did this wave not bring Vargas Llosa, who helped consolidate the democratic coalition Frente Democrático and represented it in the 1990 presidential elections, to power? People wanted change; they wanted

2. All page citations to this work refer to the 2006 edition of *El pez en el agua* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara). Translations in parentheses refer to the translation by Helen Lane published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux as *A Fish in the Water: A Memoir* (1994).

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the transparency, prosperity, and equality that Vargas Llosa believed he was capable of bringing, but they chose instead "engineer Fujimori," who styled himself as a technocrat defending the common people. It was to impress them that he left his mansion and intricate Japanese gardens, hidden in the center of Lima, to ride around on a tractor during his electoral campaign. Even though Fujimori named his party (his electoral machine) Cambio 90 and spoke of change, the masses were delighted when he assumed the familiar mien of a strict but fair father and destroyed democratic institutions to concentrate all power in his hands. Vargas Llosa describes this act of Fujimori's as a performance in which one actor puts on different masks: "Restauró, con una nueva máscara —como en esos melodramas del kabuki donde, bajo los antifaces de múltiples personajes, permanece el mismo actor— la tradición autoritaria, razón de nuestro atraso y barbarie" (587). (He restored, with a new mask—as in those Kabuki melodramas where, beneath the masks of many characters, there is always the same actor—the authoritarian tradition, the reason behind our backwardness and barbarism.)

Likewise, Trujillo in *La fiesta del Chivo* is the false father of the Dominicans. This "Padre de la Patria Nueva" (Father of the New Nation) hates and tortures his subjects with the noble purpose of straightening them out and loves them for letting him do it: "Nada ataba tanto como la sangre, cierto. Sería por eso que él se sentía tan amarrado a este país de malagradecidos, cobardes y traidores. Porque, para sacarlo del atraso, el caos, la ignorancia y la barbarie, se había teñido de sangre muchas veces. ¿Se lo agradecerían en el futuro estos pendejos?" (119). (It was true, there were no ties like blood. That must be why he felt so tied to this country of ingrates, cowards, and traitors. Because in order to pull it out of backwardness, chaos, ignorance, and barbarism, he had often been stained with blood. Would these assholes thank him for it in the future?) The novel dissolves Trujillo's mask of a strict but loving father: In addition to being impotent and sterile, he is incestuous and sadistic. Urania, the child sacrifice to the godlike leader of the nation, looks at this "Padre de la Patria Nueva" and sees an absurd old man with a "pequeño sexo muerto" (little dead sex) (511), weeping because he is unable to rape her properly.

What do cruel dictators hide under their mask of the strict but loving father? Do they have feelings? Emotions? Are they human? If the death and harm they inflict on others does not seem to trouble them, what does? Vargas Llosa's answer is this image of the weeping Trujillo: neither killing nor torturing makes him flinch, but being unable to rape a young girl brings him to tears. What a pitilessly grotesque portrayal of the Padre de la Patria Nueva. A recent film, *Tony Manero* (2008), presents the Chilean dictator Pinochet in exactly the same way: a relentless murderer shedding tears for a ridiculous reason. The character who represents the dictator in the film is a small-time middle-aged murderer with a fixation on John Travolta's character from *Saturday Night Fever.* He is the misplaced hope of his entire surrogate family, who trust him unconditionally even though he constantly violates that trust. The character's lover, her daughter, the daughter's boyfriend, and the older landlady (whom he pays with sex) all hope that he will pull them out of poverty with a dance number. Moreover, his lover would like him to be a good father to her adolescent daughter and a good companion to her. Instead,

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

he has sex with his lover's daughter and kills random people for meager gain. He kills an old lady after offering to help carry her groceries upstairs and makes off with her TV, and he kills his friend for a few pieces of glass to make an illuminated glass dance floor. He kills and hurts other people matter-of-factly, as if he were eating soup or washing dishes. Yet he, too, weeps—after being defeated in a dancing contest.

To summarize, while in *La fiesta del Chivo* Mario Vargas Llosa recounts the end of Trujillo's dictatorship as the beginning of a new autocracy, Luis Llosa edits out this pessimism from his cinematic adaptation to express his pessimism about the future of democracy in Latin America. Trujillo's political heir Balaguer seizes power and becomes the Dominican Republic's eternal president. In 2000, when the novel appeared, Balaguer was seeking a seventh presidential term, and Fujimori was preparing to serve his third term as president of Peru. Masquerading as the "nation's father," dictators camouflage their abuse of law and human rights as concern for their subjects. When Trujillo, no longer able to rape young girls or to dominate the nation, is assassinated, Balaguer steps in. Hailed as the "father of democracy," he disables the country's incipient democratic institutions. Trujillo and Balaguer, the falsely self-styled Dominican "fathers of the nation," stand in for Fujimori, who has destroyed democracy in Peru. These three autocrats, all modeled on Vargas Llosa's own abusive father, embody the writer's pessimism about the transition to democracy in Latin America. Why did the film director portray Trujillo's era as a time capsule, suspended in time and space, rather than as a metaphor for the present? Was he really more interested in the personal than in the political, as he says? Or could it be that his present (that is, when the film was being produced, from 2001 to 2005) is different? Indeed, Fujimori's regime had fallen, democratic elections had returned, and civil society had reawakened. Whatever the answer, the film assumes an entirely different attitude toward the democratic transition in Latin America, presenting it as successful and complete. This novel and film are part of a pattern in Latin American fiction and films that are in dialogue with one another on the issue of democracy. Thus, the 2008 film *Arráncame la vida*, directed by Roberto Sneider, is also more optimistic about the transition to democracy in Mexico (after the 2000 defeat of the PRI's "perfect dictatorship") than is Ángeles Mastretta's 1986 novel. In contrast, the 2012 Chilean film *No* (directed by Pablo Larraín) is more pessimistic than its source text, Antonio Skármeta's *El plebiscito.* All these works focus on the end of a dictatorship. Will this end bring real change? The answer to this question and complexity of this answer depend not on the medium but on the artist's political convictions and political present.

REFERENCES

Aznárez, Juan Jesús
2000 "Ovaciones y amenazas rodean a Vargas Llosa en la presentación dominicana de su novela." *El País* (Peru), April 28. http://elpais.com/diario/2000/04/28/cultura/956872801_850215.html.

Balaguer, Joaquín
1952 "El principio de alternabilidad en la historia dominicana." *Cielo Naranja.* http://www.cielonaranja.com/balaguerprincipio.pdf.

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Barr, Robert
2003 "The Persistence of Neopopulism in Peru? From Fujimori to Toledo." *Third World Quarterly* 24 (6): 1161–1178.

Betances, Emelio
2007 *The Catholic Church and Power Politics in Latin America: The Dominican Case in Comparative Perspective.* Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield.

Carrión, Julio F.
2005 *The Fujimori Legacy: The Rise of Electoral Authoritarianism in Peru.* University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.

Comas, José
2006 "'La fiesta del Chivo', fiel al libro." *El País* (Peru), February 12. http://elpais.com/diario/2006/02/12/cultura/1139698807_850215.html.

Conaghan, Catherine M.
2005 *Fujimori's Peru: Deception in the Public Sphere.* Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Cotler, Julio
2001 "Paradoxes of Development." In *Fractured Politics: Peruvian Democracy Past and Present,* edited by John Crabtree, 53–67. London: Institute for the Study of the Americas.

Crabtree, John
2010 "Democracy without Parties? Some Lessons from Peru." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 42 (2): 357–382.

Espinal, Rosario
1992 "Joaquín Balaguer: El eterno retorno de la política dominicana." *Nueva Sociedad* 118:109–115.

Fradinger, Moira
2010 *Binding Violence: Literary Visions of Political Origins.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Fujimori, Alberto
1992 *Mensaje a la nación del presidente del Perú, ingeniero Alberto Fujimori Fujimori.* El Congreso de la República del Perú. http://www.congreso.gob.pe/museo/mensajes/Mensaje-1992-1.pdf.
1999 Interview with Diego Barnabé. *El Espectador.* http://archive-uy.com/uy/e/enperspectiva.com.uy/2014-10-16_4734132_37/En_Perspectiva_25_años/.

García, Francisco
2006 "Fallece Ramón Alberto Font Bernard." *Diariolibre.com,* November 6. http://www.diariolibre.com/noticias/2006/11/06/i115034_fallece-ramn-alberto-font-bernard.html.

Gewecke, Frauke
2001 "*La fiesta del Chivo* de Mario Vargas Llosa: Perspectivas de recepción de una novela de éxito." *Iberoamericana* 1 (3): 151–165.

Grullón, José Núñez
2014 "Vuelve y vuelve . . ." *Ciudad Oriental, El Periódico de Santo Domingo Este.* http://ciudadoriental.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=288:vuelve-y-vuelve-&catid=139:colaboradores&Itemid=338.

Hartlyn, Jonathan
1998 *The Struggle for Democratic Politics in the Dominican Republic.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Kruger, Julie
2002 "Everyone's Invited: Power and the Body in *La fiesta del Chivo.*" *Confluencia* 18 (1): 52–58.

Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way
2010 *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Liberato, Ana S. Q.
2013 *Joaquín Balaguer, Memory, and Diaspora: The Lasting Political Legacies of an American Protégé.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Llosa, Luis, dir.
2005 *La fiesta del Chivo.* Performing Tomas Milian, Isabella Rossellini, and Paul Freeman. Spain: Future Films.

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Marcus-Delgado, Jane
2004 "Power and Political Discourse in Mario Vargas Llosa's *La fiesta del Chivo.*" *Confluencia* 19 (2): 125–133.
Pons, Frank Moya
2010 *Historia de la República Dominicana,* vol. 2. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.
Reagan, Ronald
1988 "Remarks Following Discussions with President Joaquín Balaguer Ricardo of the Dominican Republic." *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum.* http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/032588c.htm.
Vargas Llosa, Mario
2000 *La fiesta del Chivo.* Madrid: Alfaguara.
2001 "Escribir sobre la dictadura de Trujillo es escribir sobre todas las dictaduras." Interview with Diego Barnabé. *Radio El Espectador* http://www.espectador.com/text/especial/vargasll.htm.
2006 *El pez en el agua.* Buenos Aires: Alfaguara.
Wiarda, Howard J.
1995 *Democracy and Its Discontents: Development, Interdependence, and U.S. Policy in Latin America.* London: Rowman and Littlefield.
2003 *Dilemmas of Democracy in Latin America: Crises and Opportunity.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0035 Published online by Cambridge University Press